

News Release

Online enrollment has grown 60% at the University of Minnesota Crookston

By Elizabeth Tollefson on Friday, July 15, 2005

Online Learning is creating new opportunities for University of Minnesota Crookston (UMC) students. UMC's online enrollment has grown over 60% in the past 4 years says Michelle Christopherson, UMC's Center for Adult Learning Director. UMC has also grown from offering just a handful of online courses each semester to offering nearly 35 courses and the first Online Bachelor's degree in the University of Minnesota system.

Students can take the online courses from anywhere via the internet to join the instructor and fellow classmates in a virtual classroom. UMC has seen a large number of non-traditional students taking advantage of the flexibility and convenience of online learning. "Nearly 70% of our online learners are women," says Christopherson, "and many of them are returning to school to finish a degree after taking a break from their education to have a family and start their careers. The age of our students range from 16 to 65 with a good portion being 35 to 45 years-of-age. Most have a job they are continuing to hold while they attend school and also have a family with all the responsibilities of parenting included. These are hard-working, dedicated students that are really taking their learning seriously and wouldn't have been able to return to school in a traditional, campus classroom setting." "The greatest advantage with online courses is that you can work and still participate in class assignments according to your schedule", said one online student. Online learning allows these students the chance to complete a 4-year degree in order to fulfill their educational goals.

UMC is the first campus in the U of M system that has an undergraduate degree available online. The Bachelor of Applied Health degree online provides students a convenient and flexible alternative for working adults and part-time students who have relevant work experience in the healthcare industry and are interested in completing a 4-year degree. One student said she could accomplish her studies at home via the internet and not travel 100 miles to the nearest university. "I wasn't able to attend the traditional on site classroom...this was the perfect fit for me." The BAH degree currently has 22 students with 18 new students entering the program this fall and it is continuing to grow. "We get several inquiries from students each week, looking for an opportunity to continue their education but also needing to keep their job and stay home with their family. They are really excited to have a solution that doesn't require them to put their lives on hold," says Christopherson.

Online courses can look and feel very different from each other depending on how the instructor has designed the individual course to best achieve the desired learning outcomes. They offer interactivity with the instructor and other students, convenience of location and time of day, and independent learning for motivated students. "You are not alone," said one student. "It is a very friendly environment where we work together, share our experiences and really come to rely on the support of our classmates. I have become very close to some of my fellow students but have not actually met any of them face to face yet."

UMC's online classes and the Center for Adult Learning help students learn about the online environment and what to expect as an online learner. "Some students haven't been in a classroom setting for many years and have limited experience with technology and are a little apprehensive when they first get started," says Christopherson. "Our office acts as a liaison for the student...we are their eyes, ears and legs on campus. We guide them through the process of getting started and feeling comfortable in the virtual learning environment. It is a new experience that is a bit scary for many at first but within a short time, they are submitting assignments, leading discussions and sharing their experiences with other students."

To learn more about online classes, the BAH degree and events scheduled in the Center for Adult Learning website site.

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